

7th October 2020

Good

“As I know more of mankind I expect less of them, and am ready now to call a man a good man, upon easier terms than I was formerly.”

James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson

High on Byres Hill in East Lothian, overlooking the wide expanse of the Firth of Forth, stands the Hopetoun Monument, a 29-metre-tall tower which can be seen for miles around. The monument was erected in 1824 in memory of John Hope, 4th Earl of Hopetoun, and the inscription reads:

This monument was erected to the memory of the Great and Good John, Fourth Earl of Hopetoun, by his affectionate and grateful tenantry in East Lothian.

John Hope was MP for Linlithgowshire at the beginning of the 19th century, served with distinction in the 10th Light Dragoons, and, among other things, was Vice-Governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland. But for all his achievements, the one his tenants chose to inscribe on the Byres Hill monument was that he was “Great and Good”. Here was a good man, and, perhaps above all else, it was his goodness that made him great.

I once visited a man whose wife had died. He was struggling, had been drinking too much and was fairly drunk when I arrived. So, deciding this visit would be difficult, I arranged to call again the following Tuesday when he would be in a more receptive state. Fearing he would forget, I wrote to him, reminding him of the day and time I would call, and promising support for such a good man. When I called again, he was well dressed and stone-cold sober. He invited me into his kitchen while he made a cup of tea, and there was my letter fixed to the fridge door with a magnet. Underlined in red were *Tuesday 2.30pm* (sensible, I thought) and the phrase, *You’re a good man*. “Why did you underline that?” I asked. “Because,” he replied, “nobody has said that to me in the whole of my life.”

Being good matters. But it matters all the more that someone will recognise it in us and be prepared to say so – even if it’s only written in a letter and not on a monument on Byres Hill.

A prayer for today

Loving God, help me to be a mirror of your goodness. And when I see the good in someone, help me to affirm for them that they’re putting your love into action. Amen

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